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Gender-based violence against Chechen refugee women in Graz

Exploring the connection between war, flight and gender-based violence within refugee communities from the perspective of DIVAN – Counseling services for female migrants affected by "Honor-Based Violence"

> "Remembering my ordeal with the benefit of hindsight, I realized that it was a real horror for me..." Ms. P., 40 years old (Caritas 2013, 25)

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the first war in Chechyna in 1994 and during the second war in Chechyna in 1999, tens of thousands of Chechens have been forced to flee from violence and human right violations (Langthaler 2009, 165). Experts estimate the number of inhabitants has therefore decreased from 1.25 million to 400,000 (Dzutesv 2010). Since 2004, Ramsan Kadyrow has been in power in Chechnya and rules as a dictator under the protection of Vladimir Putin (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 33-37). International organizations criticize the disastrous human rights situation in Chechnya, including the persecution of opposition and regime critics. (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker 2005, 10-12). Therefore, the refugee movement from Chechnya has continued.

Since 2002, Austria has been one of the main receiving European countries for Chechen refugees. Since then, Chechens have been among the largest refugee groups in Austria (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2002-2015).[1] Austria has

[1] From 2002 until 2014 the Austrian Federal Ministry for the Interior registered 45,823 applications for asylum by citizens of the Russian Federation. The ministry estimates that of the asylum applications of citizens of the Russian Federation, 90% are Chechens. The peak of asylum

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approved a very high rate of asylum applications by Chechens – in 2004 the rate was about 94%. Since the reform of the asylum law in Austria in 2005, the rates of approved asylum applications have been dropping constantly (Langthaler 2009, 165). Nevertheless, experts claim that since the beginning of the refugee movement of Chechens to Austria in 2002, about 15,000 Chechens have settled down in Austria (Langthaler 2009, 165).

Research interest

This paper focuses on forms, patterns and types of violence towards Chechen refugee women in Graz/Austria from the perspective of a Caritas institution, called DIVAN, a counseling service supporting primarily women who are affected by "honor-based violence" (e.g. forced marriages or violence in connection with breakup or divorce). The authors analyze the connection between the experiences of war including human rights violations and persecution in the country of origin and gender-based violence against Chechen refugee women within the Chechen community in Graz.

The authors argue that the experience of war, human rights violations/persecution and flight holds the potential to strengthen hierarchical gender order within communities, leading to gender-specific forms, types and patterns of violence against women within the community.

To find out if this assumption is correct, the following research questions will be addressed:

- How has the Chechen gender order changed over the years due to war, human rights violations/persecution

applications by citizens of the Russian Federations was documented in 2003 with 6,706 applications, dropping to the lowest in 2015 with 1,694. From 2003 until 2013 Chechens remained among the top two of the largest refugee groups in Austria, later ranking eighth in 2015 due to the tripling of numbers of asylum applications by Syrians and Afghans (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2002-2015).

and what is the situation of Chechen women like in Chechnya today?
- What forms, types and patterns of violence against Chechen refugee women can be identified within the Chechen community in Graz?
- How can the connections between war/persecution/human rights violations/ flight and gender-based violence against women within the community be explained by changing gender roles?

To provide answers to these questions, the traditional gender order in Chechnya and its historical development until today is first explained. Secondly, a definition of gender-based violence is given. Thirdly, the concept, methods and the understanding of "honor-based violence" by DIVAN are provided. Through the analysis of qualitative expert interviews and through the analysis of anonymous case studies and reports of DIVAN, patterns of gender-based violence against Chechen refugee women in Graz are identified. The findings are then analyzed in the framework of the development of the Chechen gender order and its context of war experience, human rights violation, and persecution. Based on this comparison, the needs and challenges for social work in this context are explained in order to provide tools for dealing with these forms of violence from the perspective of DIVAN.

Traditional gender order in Chechnya and its historical development until today

The Chechen society is traditionally patriarchal and divided into different clans, which are subdivided into large family groups (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 14-18). Social relations between individuals in the Chechen society are organized under the traditional Chechen common law called "Adat". The law is executed by a council of male elders and provides a strict code of ethics and specific rules of behavior (Cremer 2007, 19). This includes a strict gender segregation,

which dictates to men and women their specific role in society (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 15). A Chechen man's traditional task is to protect and represent his family. He is responsible for all public, political and economic relations of the family (Cremer 2007, 26). The honor of a man is defined in line with the protection he can grant his family and the power he asserts over his family. Whenever family members do not obey the traditional rules, the patriarch is obliged to react with punishment; otherwise his "honor" is at risk (Rousseva 2004, 65). In contradistinction to the male gender role, the female gender role is traditionally confined to the private sphere. Her tasks are to take care of the children and the household. In rural areas, Chechen women are also responsible for taking care of farm animals and are heavily involved in farming production processes (Ganuschkina 2009). Women are respected as crucial and valuable members of the clan, because they significantly contribute to the agricultural production processes and assure the reproduction of the Chechen culture by giving birth and raising the offspring according to Chechen behavioral norms. The traditional, social position of Chechen women can therefore be considered to be remarkably strong, due to these women's necessary integration in the production processes and their clear duties and rights in the traditional community (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 17). Nevertheless, Chechen women cannot be considered equal members of the family, as they are not entitled to participate in decisions and do not have the same rights as men (Gannuschkina 2009). The most important virtues of women are based on their virginity – until they are married – and modesty, on the basis of which their "honor" is defined. This is a guarantee to the husband that any children born are his. As a consequence, Chechen women are under strong social mechanisms of control (Quiring 2009, 185).

In general, the traditional Chechen gender order provides men and women with different, but clear roles, tasks and behavioral expectations. Women are subordinated toward men and obliged to follow the command of their husband.

Nevertheless, both genders are expected to act accordingly to the behavioral expectations and neither of them is allowed to act outside these norms.

Throughout history, the traditional Chechen gender order has changed due to different historical, political and social developments.

In 1921, Chechnya was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union. This event alongside the collectivisation of land led to various violent uprisings by the Chechen people against the Soviet authorities. In 1944, Stalin gave orders to deport the whole Chechen people, arguing they have been collaborations between Chechens and German troops during Word War II. An estimated 100,000 people died during the deportation. In the 1950's, after the death of Stalin, the Chechen people were rehabilitated and allowed to return to their homeland (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 21-22). In the 1960's and 1970's, Chechnya's cultural life prospered alongside its industry (Politkowskaja 2008, 311). One of the political goals of the Soviet Union was gender equality. In order to reach this goal, childcare facilities were established. Women were encouraged to participate in the education system and were strongly integrated into the labor system. On the whole, activities available for women in the public sphere increased. Nevertheless, women still had to fulfill their tasks at home and still had the duty to take care of their family members (Ritter 2007, 241-242). Furthermore, women in rural areas and women less inclined to engage in educational activities faced barriers to participation in society. In summary, class and region determined the modification of women's role in Chechen society within the Soviet Union (Cremer 2007, 183).

After the decline of the Soviet Union, the Chechen national movement, under the leadership of the former Soviet air force general Dschochar Dudajew, formed the National Congress of the Chechen People and propagated the national independence of Chechnya. In 1991, Dschochar Dudajew, meanwhile elected president of the National Congress, declared the national independence of Chechnya from Russia (Schinnerl and

Schmidinger 2009, 23f; Quiring 2009, 131). In response, the Russians implemented economic sanctions, which led to economic tension and conflicts between clans over oil resources and power. Dudajew was unable to restore internal economic and political stability.

In 1994, Russian armed forces entered Chechnya to restore the Chechen territory as a part of the Russian Federation (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 26). The war between armed forces of the Russian Federation and the Chechen nationalists lasted from 1994 until 1996, presenting an unexpected challenge for Russian troops. As a reaction, in 1996 a peace treaty including a ceasefire agreement was signed, thus postponing discussions on the future status of Chechnya until 2001. The interwar period from 1996 until 1999 was characterized by economic collapse of the region. The unemployment rate was about 95% and illegal economic sectors, such as the sectors of trade in weapons and drugs, and criminal actions, such as depredation and kidnapping, increased (Hassel 2003, 43). President Maschadow, who had been elected president in 1997 and who also favored the national independence of Chechnya and a national, secular state (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 30), could not stabilize the country economically or politically (Rau 2002, 36). His position was also undermined by the fact that the internal Chechen opposition under the leadership of Schamil Bassajew, began to cooperate with international, Islamic Wahhabi groups and started to favor an Islamic state under the Sharia instead of a national, democratic Chechen state.

In 1999, under the command of Schamil Bassjaew and Ibn al-Chattab, 1,200 fighters originally from Jordan and fighting for the worldwide realization of an Islamic state entered Dagestan and pronounced the Chechen-Dagestan Islamic state. This event was the official reason given by the Russians for the beginning of the second war in Chechnya, which was officially, or from the perspective of the Russians, a war against international, Islamic based terrorism (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 32). The military operations by the

Russian forces in Chechnya were characterizes by massive brutality against the civil society, including ethnic cleansing, torture of suspects in detention centers, organized mass rapes, executions and intense air strikes (Leitner 2006, 11).

During the period of wars in Chechnya, and especially during the second war, people had to face violence, human rights crimes, economic breakdown, degradation of the environment and infrastructure, as well as continuing political instability. All this led to massive changes within Chechen society, since that society had to adapt to the new circumstances as far as possible. This adaptation entailed a shift in gender roles. Because of the absence of the male population – who were engaged in fighting, were injured, killed or had to flee – women were forced to assume traditional male duties and the responsibility to provide for their families (Gannuschkina 2009). They negotiated with authorities to locate arrested family members, took care of injured soldiers, prepared their sons to participate in the fighting or even fought actively themselves (Cremer 2007, 185-187). In 2000, 2002 and 2004, female suicide bombers were involved in the terror attacks in Chechnya, Moscow and Beslan (Jusik 2005, 7-14). Other women organized themselves, becoming politically engaged and founding peace committees and organizations (Amica e.V. 2010). Altogether, the tasks and roles of women expanded widely. Nevertheless, this had a limited emancipatory effect because the expansion of the women's tasks was necessary in order to support the war and guarantee the survival of the Chechen people (Cremer 2007, 37).

In March 2000, Vladimir Putin, by then prime minister of the Russian Federation and running for president, officially ended the war, although the fighting continued. The war activities were now officially called anti-terrorist operations. Putin created an interim administration in Chechnya whose head was the former Grand Mufti Achmed Kadyrov, who had defected to the Russians. Kadyrov was able to build up a private army of bodyguards, which was the key to stabilizing his power (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 33-37).

After the traumatic experience of war, attempts to re-activate the traditional social structures provided a way of handling the chaos and crisis within society. In the social discourse, patriarchal ideology and the re-introduction of as well as a general focus on an alleged traditional gender order was reinforced. Subsequently, women were returned into the private sphere and their scope of action was minimized (Cremer 2007, 183-184).

In 2004, Achmed Kadyrov was killed in a bomb attack. His son Ramsan succeeded him and has continued ever since to be Chechnya's president under the protection of Vladimir Putin (Schinnerl and Schmidinger 2009, 33-37). Ramsan Kadyrov rules as a dictator. He strategically staffed political positions with members of his clan and persecuted opposition and regime critics. Kadyrov has fostered a cult of personality around himself and his father, while spreading an authoritarian, nationalist Islam, in opposition to the international, rigid Wahhabi Islam which the realization of a worldwide Islamic state based on the Sharia. Kadyrov's Islam is just as much in opposition to the traditional Chechen, mystical and non-institutionalized Sufi-based Islam (Maaß 2009, 79-81).

Opposition members and their families are persecuted and often disappear. Either that or they are killed. Health care is rarely provided, which leads to a high mortality rate and an increase in diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker 2005, 10-12). The economy is still in crisis and the unemployment rate is about 90% (Tschetschenien-Komitee 2004, 120). Jobs and public services are only available through bribery. Education is insufficiently provided because there is a lack of teachers, teaching materials and schools (Maaß 2009, 84). President Ramsan Kadyrov propagandizes a reactivation and an intensification of alleged patriarchal traditions, on the pretext of constructing the Chechen national unity and stabilizing his power. His special focus in doing so is on the role of women in society (Amica e.V. 2010). To reassert male dominance and to exclude women again from public life and decision-making, he implemented

certain reforms, such as the introduction of polygamy and of a strict dress codes for women, as well as the minimization of possibilities for female employment. Kadyrov regularly states his concept of moral obligations for women. For example, from his perspective, Chechen women are not supposed to use mobile phones, are not allowed to criticize their husbands and are to be considered the property of men. In support of his policies, Kadyrov argues that his policies refer to the Chechen traditions. As a matter of fact, these policies are not in compliance with the traditional Chechen gender order, which gave women subordinated, but clear roles and protected them against arbitrary violence by strangers. In contradiction, Kadyrov's measures and policies result in an increase of violence against women. On the streets, women are insulted and attacked by Kadyrov's followers and bridal abduction is increasing. As a result, young women live in fear of going out on the streets (Human Rights Watch 2011, Human Rights Watch 2012, Gannuschkina 2009, Amica e.V. 2010). This stands again in contrast to the traditional Chechen order where only male relatives were allowed to discipline and sanction their female relatives.

In general, the official authorities in Chechnya do not prosecute violence against women (Bazaeva 2009). Human rights activists who criticize the current situation of women are kidnapped or killed. As we can see, women in Chechnya face a dramatic deprivation of their rights, direct discrimination, social pressure and increasing violence (Amnesty International 2009).

Definition of gender-based violence and violence in the "name of honor"

Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon (World Health Organization 2002, 5). In spite of various measures taken at the national and international level, practice shows that women worldwide do not receive the support that would

ensure that violence against them be prevented. Knowledge about gender-based violence is scarce, authorities do not systematically record acts of violence and the estimated number of unreported cases is high (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014, 1).

The EU-wide survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on violence against women found that an estimated figure of 13 million women became victims of physical violence in 2011 (this corresponds to 7 per cent of women resident in the EU between 18 and 74 years of age) and one of 20 women (5 per cent) aged 14 or older was raped (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014, 3).

Definition of gender-based violence and the notion of violence

Violence against women generally represents a breach of human rights and a form of discrimination. As defined by the Council of Europe, it "shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (Council of Europe 2011, 4).

Violence against women or "'gender-based violence against women' shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately" (Council of Europe 2011, 4).

Gender-based violence typically occurs in the immediate social environment and thus involves people in an emotional or intimate relationship. These manifestations of violence include domestic violence, sometimes also referred to as "violence in the family"[2] or "violence in the social environment"

[2] Violence committed against men, women, children, elderly people, disadvantaged people, people in need of care (Godenzi 1996, 27).

(Godenzi 1996, 27). Given the different definitions of violence and the resulting lack of indicators necessary for quantification of the problem, cases of "violence in the name of honor" in Austria have not yet been included to a sufficient extent in the public documentation either of domestic violence or of violence in the immediate social environment (Latcheva et al. 2006, 48).

Violence in the "Name of Honor"

Honor-based violence is a form of violence used to maintain or reassert the alleged honor of the family. In strongly patriarchal contexts, the honor of the family is reflected by the "correct" behavior of the family members who are regarded as the property of the men. If a female family member commits a breach of the predominant norms (e.g. virginity, significance of marriage) whereby the norm represents a "validation of social behavior in the eyes of the public" (Schiffauer 1983, 75[3]), sanctions are imposed.

Acts of honor-based violence happen worldwide, independent from religious, ethnical or national backgrounds. Reports of NGOs show that honor-based violence occurs in Christian and Islamic societies, in Europe and Asia, as well as in America. In general it can be said that honor-based violence exists in traditionally patriarchal societies, in which women are subordinated toward men and the honor of a man is worth more than the life of a women (Terres des Femmes 2005, 7).

According to Terres des Femmes (2005, 6[4]), "various forms of criminal acts range from emotional blackmail and psychological pressure to physical and sexualized violence in order to prevent women from leading a self-determined life."

Even if the reasons for this type of violence are similar to the reasons for domestic violence, e.g. "honor" and "masculinity", one important difference with regard to the

[3] Own translation.
[4] Own translation.

perpetrators stands out: domestic violence is usually committed almost exclusively by (ex-) partners; actions or crimes "in the name of honor", however, are committed by (male) relatives such as fathers, uncles, cousins and brothers. The source of threat is different and the affected women rarely find any support within their own community (Glaubitz 2014[5]). Even if the woman who is threatened can flee from the family in time to escape the sanction, she nevertheless remains under a permanent and massive threat for the rest of her life (Terres des Femmes 2005, 10).

In moral terms, there is no sense of wrongdoing on the part of the perpetrators. There are even women who back the decision on "sanctions". This becomes evident in the lack of cooperation with the police and with legal authorities in the investigation of crimes (Glaubitz 2014).

The Istanbul Convention on "preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence" held by the Council of Europe explicitly states that "culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called 'honor' shall not be regarded as justification for such acts" (Council of Europe: 2011, 15). According to reports by the United Nations, crimes in the name of honor are committed in at least 14 countries all over the world. In some countries, there is even a legal basis allowing such crimes (United Nations General Assembly 2002, 8).

The notion of "honor killing" is controversially discussed by international bodies and experts because no murder can be "honorable", yet alternative denominations have not prevailed (Terre des Femmes 2011, 7).

[5] The Munich-based publish house Random House under the lead of Uta Glaubitz operates a website specifically dedicated to document the honor killings that have become known in Germany. The information is gathered from the media and from court decisions. The first reported case is from 1981. Available at: http://www.ehrenmord.de/ (Glaubitz 2014).

DIVAN – Counseling service for female migrants affected by "Honor-based Violence"

The counseling service DIVAN belonging to Caritas Graz-Seckau (Austria) bases its definition of violence against women on the definition used in the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe 2011, 10.), which broadly discusses the various forms of violence against women. Articles 33 to 40 enumerate the following manifestations of violence: psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence including rape, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilization, and sexual harassment (Council of Europe 2011, 13-15).

Gender-specific violence in the immediate social environment is the focus of the crisis intervention work and counseling service of DIVAN. The main target group that receives counseling are women threatened by, "violence in the name of honor". The definition of this form of violence that is "used to maintain or reassert alleged 'family honor'" (Terre des Femmes 2005, 6) is used by non-governmental organizations deliberately in order to make this phenomenon visible; DIVAN also uses this definition and this approach.

"The crisis intervention work and counseling of DIVAN focuses on non-violent prospects for the future of women and girls through actively dealing with women's rights and equal opportunities and empowerment of the female migrants." (Caritas 2014a, 5[6]).

DIVAN is a contact point for young girls and women faced with the prospect of forced marriage or who are confronted with force exerted by family members regarding the choice of the (male or female) partners. The main target group of DIVAN, which is financed exclusively by public funds also includes women who are in a forced marriage and require support for separation, divorce or withdrawal from a violent relationship. (Caritas 2014b, 15). According to the annual

[6] Own translation.

statistics of DIVAN, the majority of the clients are informed about the programs through word of mouth, some are also referred to DIVAN by other counseling institutions or authorities. Individual solutions are developed with the victims and implemented according to the socio-economic context, the situation regarding rights of residence, and the various possibilities for dealing with so-called "loss of honor". This work is carried out discreetly; the main issue is establishing trust between the counselor and the woman seeking help. The first meetings are aimed at gathering information about the acute situation and at threat assessment. Subsequently, psychosocial stabilization and legal counseling are provided, and ultimately also housing (e.g. in the women's shelter). In order to be able to protect particularly endangered women effectively, some cases require a relocation (e.g. to another Austrian province) or, in cooperation with the authorities, some women also need to receive a new identity. The interdisciplinary DIVAN team practices critical partisanship with its clients, critically analyses the various forms of violence, and offers advocacy for a self-determined, non-violent future for the women who receive the counseling. Efforts are undertaken to carry out individual work with the clients, in order to avoid the reinforcement of existing stereotypes regarding ethnicity and gender (Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2014b; Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2015; Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2016).

Chechen clients

Since the counseling work at DIVAN started with the pilot phase in the second semester of 2010, 40 Chechen women have been provided with counseling and assistance. The following statistics give an overview of the main countries of origin of the DIVAN clients. No Chechen woman has so far belonged to the group of second or third-generation immigrants. Table 1 is based on the statistics included in the DIVAN annual reports where the Chechen women are referred

to as belonging to the Russian Federation. However, according to a survey conducted by DIVAN, 100 per cent of these women belong to the Chechen community (Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2010-2015).

	1.7.–31.12. 2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Austria	7	14	11	21	6	6
Turkey	7	20	20	29	40	30
Afghanistan	2	11	15	16	14	11
Other countries	4	31	41	51	81	87
Chechnya	**1**	**7**	**6**	**10**	**9**	**7**
Clients per year	21	83	93	127	150	141

Table 1: DIVAN clients and their countries of origin (Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2010-2015)

Among the clients of DIVAN, the group of women affected by violence from Chechnya is about 6,5 percent[7] on average per year. Since 2010, the largest target groups related to "violence in the name of honor" have been Turkish women with an annual average of about 24 percent, followed by Afghan

[7] Percentage of Chechen clients in proportion to the total number of clients per year: Second semester 2010: 4.7 %, 2011: 8.4 %, 2012: 6.5 %, 2013: 7.8%, first semester 2014: 5.3 % (Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2010-2015).

women with about 11 percent (Caritas der Diözese Graz-Seckau 2010-2015).

Forms, types and patterns of violence against Chechen refugee women within the Chechen community in Graz

In order to identify forms, types and patterns of violence against Chechen refugee women within the Chechen community in Graz, the authors used the following sources: the annual project report of DIVAN, five anonymous case studies of Chechen clients of DIVAN, and four expert interviews. The women described in the case studies were between 15 and 25 years old. Two of them have three children each, were married and came to DIVAN for support in the context of divorce or separation from their partners. All of them fled to Austria, where only two of them had a positive asylum status and where three of them were active asylum seekers at the time when they contacted DIVAN. The persons interviewed were three interdisciplinary counselors working for DIVAN: one a lawyer (E1), one a social worker (E4) and the other a psychologist (E2). These three female experts have been working for DIVAN for four years on average and therefore have considerable experience with different clients and several case studies. In order to include the perspective of the work with Chechen men who are or have been perpetrators, the authors also included another expert interview by a psychologist (E3) working at a men's intervention center, which focuses on working with male perpetrators in Graz and therefore also with Chechen male perpetrators. In the data analysis, the following forms, types and patterns of violence were identified.

Domestic violence committed by (ex-)partners within the Chechen community

This form of violence is committed individually in the private sphere; the only witnesses often are the children (E4). The

violence takes physical, economic, sexual and psychological forms. The triggers named by one expert (E3) are feelings of powerlessness and a lack of conflict-solving measures for everyday problems. All experts observe that domestic violence often is not considered to be problematic either by the men/perpetrators, or by the women/victims. On the contrary, it is regarded as "normal", given that domestic violence is not sanctioned in the country of origin, Chechnya. According to expert E4, information about the Austrian legal system leads to cognitive knowledge that violence against women is prohibited, but this knowledge does not change the personal attitude and persuasion that men have the right to discipline their wives. Women run the highest risk of experiencing violence when they speak about their plans to separate or get divorced. This is often followed by the threat that the children will continue to live in the man's family, as is customary in their home country. This threat is interpreted by one expert (E2) as a "measure of constant exercise of discipline". In the everyday work of DIVAN, the team (E1, E4) was confronted with several cases of child abduction within Austria.

Moreover, women are particularly intimidated when they are informed that their husbands possess weapons or know that their husbands can arrange for access to a weapon (E4). The brutality of the violence exerted – strapping, lashing, crushing objects on the woman's body – is likened by the women to what their husbands experienced during war and under torture (E4). Most women do not know about the existence of supportive institutions, as for example women's shelters, because such institutions do not exist in these women's home country (E1).

Violence "in the name of honor" within the Chechen community

As outlined above, this form of violence is typically exerted, approved of and endorsed collectively by several people such

as the extended family[8] or the ethnic community. It is triggered by a so-called "loss of honor" for which the woman is held responsible because she does not comply to norms and does not fully endorse the ascribed role of "decent" woman and/or mother and/or because she does not seek the protection of a man (E4). The Chechen women themselves report the existence of a strict code of ethics set by "the elders", which also has consequences for their everyday life in Austria. Chechen women thus are not supposed to ride a bicycle, just as they must follow a certain dress code and tie their headscarves "correctly". Apart from these infractions, separation and divorce are clearly disapproved of, even by other women (E1, E4). The families of origin do not endorse self-determined freedom of choice. Given the traditional values, the belief that one is not free to self-determine is so deeply rooted in the Chechen women that they do not see any alternatives for themselves. One Chechen woman, for instance, whose husband left her and the two children, immediately wanted to return to Chechnya voluntarily in order to seek the protection of her father. It was entirely beyond her imagination that her status as a recognized refugee allowed her to live in Austria even as a single parent (E4).

Members of the community consider it rightful to exert social control by threatening and intimidating women verbally and by injuring them. As a case in point, it can happen that women are called or threatened by men unknown to them or that they are subject to threats and physical violence in the public space (E4). The incidents range from public insult, i.e., being named a "whore", to the dissemination of false rumors (E2), to expulsion from the community, something that is called "social death" by the members of DIVAN (E1, E4). It is often confirmed that the men within the community are well connected with each other within Austria and also to people still living in Chechnya, especially through mobile phone

[8] Female family members also back the sanctions for violations of standards (E1, E4).

contacts (E2). As a result, women are afraid of the support the men of the local community receive from men living in other Austrian provinces. They also must seriously expect additional violent sanctions for their breach of norms in case they return to Chechnya voluntarily or are deported there (E1). Apart from this rigid social control and potential violent sanctions, the women also report that mistrust within the community is at a high level. They relate this mistrust to the political history of Chechnya and name it "persecution mania" (E4). The existing governmental support programs and legal provisions in Austria are predominantly targeted at domestic violence committed by (ex-)partners (e.g. expulsion and prohibition from return) and have only limited applicability to cases of "violence in the name of honor" and collective perpetrators (E1).

Violence with regard to the free choice of partners within the Chechen community

According to the Chechen value system, the interests of families prevail over those of a single person, thus the interests of the families must also be taken into account in the choice of the future (male or female) partner. Intra-ethnic marriages are the rule. Bi-national relationships can lead to violence due to the social control of the community (E4). Secret affairs must be ended when it can be expected that the family will not endorse a self-determined choice of partner. The experts know of cases where a woman's family had to pay "damages" after a relationship was ended, in order to prevent any potential "loss of honor" from being incurred within the community (E4).

Sometimes, (young) women are no longer virgins after having experienced sexual violence during war and during their flight and therefore do not meet the usual requirement for marriage. As a result, they must be "grateful" to find a husband (E4). Widows, most of whom lost their husbands in the war, are expected to seek the protection of a man again soon because living as a single woman with children is hardly

tolerated (E4). Upon their arrival in Austria, some women were confronted with the fact that their husband, who had fled some time earlier, had in the meantime acquired a second "wife" or even a second family. For economic reasons, the women affected tolerated this situation for love of the common children until the psychological pressure arising from the permanent deprecation became intolerable (E4).

A special form of violence related to the free choice of partners is forced marriage. According to the experts, forced marriage is not the norm, but it can occur and has the same motives in Chechen culture as in other cultures. The family of the bride decides on the future husband and imposes this decision with force or use of violence by disrespecting the norm of free expression of the two directly affected parties (E4). A crime that is specifically committed against Chechens is the so-called "bridal abduction", the violent abduction of a young, sometimes still underage woman, by a "future" husband and other male supporters, mostly by car. The staff members of DIVAN know of local cases of bridal abduction that, according to the descriptions of clients, all follow similar patterns (E4). The experts notice certain ambivalence in the attitude of the women affected: these women sometimes seem to insinuate that they feel proud of their abduction. The experts, however, doubt that these women fully understand the implications of this act, which often takes place over several days. The young women are suddenly at the center of attention of their families and thus receive the attention they had not received previously because they were taught to concentrate exclusively on the household (E4). During the bridal abduction sexual violence occurs, thus leading to a loss of virginity, which is retrospectively amended through the bride price paid to the bride's family. A staff member of DIVAN (E4) compares this behavior with consumer behavior: "A previously chosen woman is bought by way of bridal abduction." As a matter of fact, the woman can at no point articulate her own will, and, as a result of the abduction, she is forced to marry the man. To the knowledge of the experts, bridal abduction

committed out of revenge against another family, as known from the Turkish community, does not happen among Chechens. What is known, however, is fear of honor killings on the territory of Chechnya (E4).

The various forms of violence are linked to each other and lead to acute and long-term physical, psychological, economic or sexual damage. This includes injuries, eating disorders, suicide attempts, hospitalization, loss of work and housing, loss of social contacts and support networks, debt and problems connected with the right of residence if the reason for being granted the right of residence or asylum is linked to that of the husband (E1).

In these cases, the Chechens affected normally do not receive support from their Chechen friends or family members because they behavior, which deviates from the Chechen norms, is not tolerated (E2). Instead, the Chechen clients confined themselves to persons working for institutions, such as teachers, social workers or counselors. The fact that the women talk about family conflicts with persons outside their community, which is a taboo, is a clear indicator of their enormous despair (E2).

In contrast to the Chechen women, the perpetrators can reasonably expect that the community endorses their acts (E2, E4). They need not justify their acts because they regard themselves as the protectors and representatives of traditional norms (Connell 1999, 104).

Identified gender roles of Chechen women and Chechen men in the context of violence

When taking a closer look at the forms of violence occurring among Chechen refugees, we need to put these forms of violence into the context of the historical development of the Chechen gender order and of the experience of war and flight. According to the experience of DIVAN, some reference to the traditional patriarchal gender roles has a strong impact on how Chechen women and men understand and live their gender roles. The case studies and the experience shared by the

experts confirm that Chechen women assume a subordinated role within the family and community, a subordination which is held to justify the experience of violence. They see and experience that their most important roles are those of being a wife and mother (E1). Experts claimed, in the interviews, that motherhood and marriage are the only ways a woman can gain respect and enjoy a high status within the family and community (E1, E4). Single women such as widows or divorced women are encouraged to get married again or return to their ex-partners (if so wished by the ex-partners and their families) because without a husband or a family, a Chechen woman is not considered valuable (E1). Very important virtues expected of Chechen women are modesty, the silent and consistent endurance of personal tragedies and pain or hardship, and diligence at work. The particular significance of these virtues is related to the experience of war and flight, which made it necessary for the Chechen women to show strength in order to survive, even if their husbands were not available to support them. The experts in the interviews underline that their female clients agree that they cannot and should not lead a self-determined life by themselves (E1, E2, E4). This stands in contrast to the experience of Chechen women during the war, but could be explained by the fact that the situation during the war was an exceptional and undesired situation, just as the situation of having to live in exile after fleeing from Chechnya is exceptional and undesired. It emerges from the case studies that, due to the norm that women should not live by themselves, and because women regard themselves as incapable of living alone, many Chechen clients of DIVAN find it difficult to end a violent relationship by leaving their families and community. In the case studies, it is young Chechen women in particular who have great ambitions for their future career path, who wish to improve their education and who have concrete ideas about their future careers. The women, however, adapt these plans, so that they do not conflict with family values and the strict behavioral norms of family, which norms these women adhere to and do not question. This means

that ties to allegedly traditional patriarchal gender norms have a great impact on the Chechen women, even though these women contact DIVAN for counseling in cases of violence, and even though they actually have concrete plans for their professional future and are eager to make their educational and vocational dreams come true. The norms require that a woman make her roles as wife and mother her first priority. This, of course, makes it difficult to end a violent relationship.

Regarding the role of men within the Chechen community, Chechen men regard themselves, as described before, as the heads of their families whose duties are providing for and protecting their family members. This duty also applies to the eldest son of a family who needs to replace his father in case he or any other older male relatives are not available (E1). In the context of war and flight many Chechen men have experienced their inability to protect their family members and the family property. Moreover, once they arrived in Austria, Chechen men were unable to provide for their families because of the restrictions on the Austrian labor market. Their qualifications or work experience obtained in Chechnya were not recognized in Austria, thereby leading to long-term-unemployment or employment in unskilled jobs (E3). In addition to violent traumatizing experiences during war and flight, this leads to a loss of identification and to the feeling that they have failed. The result is a sense of powerlessness and frustration, which is vented by aggression and violence within their families. In this way the male head of a family demonstrates his power of control and, in an extreme form, his readiness to defend (E3). It is very common among Chechens to engage in martial arts, a leisure activity which is also supported by their mothers and wives, women who are proud of the sporting achievements of their male partners or sons (E4). The image of the fighting man is a form of potential self-identification, which, in turn, reflects the normalization of violence. According to E3, "violence among men is extremely normalized, is never mentioned and is an intricate part of their lives." The experts also report that Chechen women who are affected by

severe violence committed by their husbands attribute this to the traditional gender order and to the violence their husbands have experienced as victims during war or persecution. The committed violence is thus supported and justified, even by Chechen women (E1, E2).

Associating war experience, human rights violation, persecution and flight of Chechens with gender-based violence

First of all, it must be understood that domestic violence by men against women occurs in all societies, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social class and educational background. What all forms of domestic violence have in common is that they are connected to a patriarchal understanding of gender roles in which the man is superior to the woman. (Sauer and Strasser 2008).

The particular tendencies that characterize the violence against women occurring within the Chechen refugee community in Graz, however, seem to be the following:

- The violence can be massive and involve e.g. the use of weapons, threats of murder and methods similar to torture, such as lashing the woman while she is tied up.
- The violence involves the whole community in threatening or exerting the collective violence.
- Mobile and internet devices are used to reinforce the threats.
- The focus of the violence is to control the choice of partner and the re-productivity of women and to enforce only intra-ethnic marriage.

In order to understand these violent tendencies towards women within the Chechen community, the historical background and the recent social, economic, cultural and political developments in Chechnya as well their impact of gender roles must be understood. During and between the above-mentioned wars following the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the

Chechen people were confronted with high levels of violence against the civil population. They experienced torture and still experience dramatic human rights violations, as well as a high level of state arbitrariness combined with an omnipresent threat of persecution and violence. Almost all families of DIVAN's Chechen clients have lost friends and family and have experienced war. The experience of high levels of violence is thus present in all these families (E4). Moreover, the danger of extermination of the Chechen people is still present in the collective memory of the Chechens who fled their home country from their experience during the deportation by Stalin and from recent wars in Chechnya. Therefore, the Chechen community living in exile considers it essential to maintain a reorganized Chechen community until a return to Chechyna is possible. In this context, the reproductive role of women plays a key role in producing Chechen descendants. Therefore, the control of female re-productivity and of a woman's choice of partner is a key element in sustaining the Chechen community. The same applies to all patriarchal societies preparing for war or acting in violent conflicts (Cockburn 2001, 13-29).

The Chechen community, including men and women, in Graz, has experienced social, cultural as well as economic losses due to experiences of war, flight and the life in exile. When faced with extreme social, cultural and economic disruption, the alleged return to traditional gender roles is actually a turn towards direct and indirect violence against the subordinated, but traditionally valuable, women in the community. Violence serves as a vehicle to overcome the experience of loss of manhood and for restoring and reorganizing an imagined ideal of a Chechen society, an ideal which has never been realized in this idealized form.

Challenges and needs analysis for social work with and for Chechen refugees

Based on the forms of violence against women within the Chechen community that have been identified, counseling institutions and social organizations face a number of challenges and must abide by a number of requirements. These challenges and the requirements that enable the affected women to be adequately and professionally supported are now described below.

First of all it is important to understand the concept and the methods of collective violence within the Chechen community. This requires background knowledge about the traditional gender order and about the moral concepts and patterns of behavior within the Chechen community. Furthermore, the forms of violence must be related to the experience of flight and war and to the traumas connected with such experience, in order to understand the violence as manifestations of these traumas. This in turn requires knowledge about Chechen history and about the current political situation in Chechnya. Intercultural competence is thus an important requirement for people employed by social organizations to fulfill the role of a translator between different cultural backgrounds. Whilst intercultural understanding must not be a reason for relativizing or justifying violence, the ascription of ethnical, cultural and religious stereotypes must nevertheless not be reinforced, in order to avoid Chechen men being condemned from the start as perpetrators of violence.

In order to be able to assess the risk of potential collective violence, the authorities, counseling services and crisis intervention centers must cooperate on the basis of the same risk assessment.

Supporting Chechen women and other women affected by violence requires solidarity with each individual woman, just as it requires a consideration of her needs and of her own decisions. If the woman decides to lead a life outside her own community, this requires empowerment in the form of in-depth

information and encouragement to withdraw from traditions which impede social emancipation and equal rights for women and men (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich 2007, 53).

All this is only feasible if essential resources and structural requirements are available for women which enable them to lead independent lives. This includes a secure residence status, educational perspectives, access to the labor market and affordable housing, child-care facilities as well as access to free or affordable psychotherapy to deal with experiences of flight and violence. If these requirements are not provided, starting a new, non-violent life is almost impossible. It is the task of national governments to assure that these requirements and resources are available. Therefore, the national governments are asked to provide the legal and structural framework, support counseling services, and crisis intervention centers with adequate funding.

A large gap that still needs to be filled is the need to work with the perpetrators of violence so as to show them both possible ways of breaking the cycle of violence and alternative ways of acting. Moreover, effective work with perpetrators of violence must include psychological support and must involve knowledge about the perpetrators' cultural background. Finding ways of motivating perpetrators of violence to take part in anti-violence training programs on a voluntary basis is still an open issue. This requires innovative projects, including prevention initiatives carried out directly in the communities with the involvement of peers and internal Chechen community leaders.

Under-age Chechen girls affected by violence represent a target group that is particularly vulnerable, as experts claimed in the interviews (E1, E4). Being of minor age, these girls strongly depend on their families of origin. They need to deal not only with the violence they have experienced but also with the challenges of adolescence and are thus subject to particularly acute conflicts of loyalty. Moreover, they do not even have access to the institutions that are in place for protection against violence. In Austria, women's shelters are not allowed

to receive under-age girls because the only authorities competent to deal with minors are the children's and young people's services in Austria. Such services in Austria, however, are not responsible for offering minors anonymous protection against violence committed by their families of origin. On the contrary, their task is to co-operate with parents and to make sure that the parents are again involved (Orient Express 2012, 3). As a result, this target group is excluded from the existing support structures for the protection of victims of violence.

Last but not least, the experience of the interdisciplinary team of DIVAN shows that stable financing of low-threshold, gender-based counseling institutions and social organizations with interdisciplinary teams is an indispensable precondition for high-quality violence protection work.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how the Chechen gender order has changed throughout history. Based on a traditional, patriarchal understanding of gender roles in a rural agriculture- and clan-based society, Chechen gender roles were modified during the Soviet Union, were challenged after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and during the following years of war, arbitrary dictatorship, and of flight and life in exile.

Today we find new forms and patterns towards gender-based violence and honor-based violence against women in Chechnya as well as among Chechens living in exile in Graz. Specifically in Graz, the review and analysis of documentation reports, case studies and expert interviews, could identify the following forms, types and patterns of violence against Chechen refugee women: gender-based violence against Chechen refugee women in Graz occurs in different physical, psychological, sexual, economic and structural forms, which are often interlinked with each other. The violence shows the particular tendency to occur not only in isolated cases and in the form of domestic violence (committed by (ex-) partners)

within the nuclear family, but also and particularly in the form of "violence in the name of honor" committed collectively by the Chechen refugee community. Moreover, this violence is characterized by a very high degree of manifest violence with the focus being on the collective social control of the behavior of Chechen women. This control is to prevent women from choosing their partners in a self-determined way and also from exercising their reproductive rights.

The found forms and tendencies of gender-based violence must be understood in the context of the development of the Chechen gender order and its connection to the atrocities committed against the civilian population during the wars, the serious human rights violations still occurring in Chechnya, and the experience of tremendous social, cultural and economic loss due to prosecution, flight and living in exile. Gender-based violence in this context serves as a vehicle to overcome the experience of loss and specifically the loss of manhood, and to restore an ideal of an alleged traditional Chechen society, which has never been real in this specific imagined form.

It must be emphasized that a general stereotyping of traditional gender roles and a focus on static cultural images or ethnic-based forms of violence does not do justice either to the victims or to the perpetrators and does not help in developing solutions. The prerequisites for successful individual and empowerment-oriented interdisciplinary support of women affected by violence are, firstly, the consistent condemnation by the authorities and by the counseling institutions of all forms of violence, and, secondly, a comprehensive knowledge and differentiated understanding of the social, historical and political background of the Chechen society and of the fates of individuals connected with it.

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Interviews with Experts:

Expert 1: Lawyer, female, Graz (23/05/2014), working for DIVAN since 2011.

Expert 2: Psychologist, female, Graz (26/05/2014), working for DIVAN since 2012.

Expert 3: Psychologist, male, Graz (09/07/2014), working for "Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark" since 2000.

Expert 4: Social worker, female, Graz (12/07/2014), working for DIVAN since 2011.

Case studies:

Case Study 1: Chechen woman A., age 25, Divan 2014

Case Study 2: Chechen woman B., age 20, Divan 2014

Case Study 3: Chechen woman C., age 15, Divan 2014

Case Study 4: Chechen woman D., age 23, Divan 2014

Case Study 5: Chechen woman E., age 18, Divan 2014